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TBIO

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR LAGON APPLAUDS PROGRESS, IDENTIFIES
OUTSTANDING CHALLENGES ON TIP IN MEXICO

REF: 07 MEXICO 5704

11. Summary: On January 9-12, Ambassador Mark P. Lagon, Director, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP), met with Mexican immigration officials and NGOs in Tapachula, Chiapas to discuss trafficking in persons (TIP), especially with regard to Central Americans entering Mexico. During Ambassador Lagon's trip to Mexico, he also met with the Mexican Attorney General, Eduardo Tomas Medina-Mora Icaza, National Human Rights Commission's (CNDH) Program Coordinator Against Trafficking in Persons, Dr. Sadot Sanchez Carreno, National Migration Institute's Commissioner, Cecilia Romero and representatives from Mexico's Foreign Relations Secretariat (SRE). Anti-TIP discussions focused on progress

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since Lagon's last visit in August and steps the GOM plans to take to strengthen efforts to combat TIP in the wake of Mexico's passage of a new anti-TIP federal law. End Summary.

AMBASSADOR LAGON EXPLORES MEXICO-GUATEMALA BORDER

12. Lax border regulation characterizes much of Mexico's southern border. Mexican immigration officials told Lagon that there are segments of the border without security officials to regulate the flow of products or people into the country, stressing the need for better technology and manpower to combat illegal activities. On the other hand, immigration officials insisted they were committed to combating the sex and labor trafficking flowing into Mexico from the South. Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) described a plan to issue new work permits (which will include workers' biographical information) that will be used to track workers and their employers. This is seen as one way to address trafficking flows. The new work permits will allow migration officials to do periodic checks on employers to ensure that they are following correct hiring procedures. Cecilia Romero, INM's Commissioner said that the new work permits are expected to take effect later this year.

CHALLENGES FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANTS ENTERING MEXICO

13. Labor exploitation is one of the biggest concerns for officials in Tapachula, in the southern part of the State of Chiapas on Mexico's southwest border with Guatemala. Several

complaints have been filed against farm owners exploiting Central American guest workers who work on coffee, mango or sugar cane plantations in southern Mexico. In addition to labor exploitation, migrants are vulnerable to becoming victims of sex trafficking, organized crime groups, disease, and corrupt police officials. Ciudad Talisman and Ciudad Hidalgo are the two towns in Chiapas that figure most prominently in the region's sex and labor trafficking problems:

--Ciudad Talisman located north of Tapachula is the gathering point for Central Americans looking for work and/or heading north.

--Ciudad Hidalgo located south of Tapachula is known for significant numbers of individuals involved in sex trafficking and prostitution.

14. In addition to challenges involving sex and labor exploitation, Juan Artola, Chief of Mission at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said migration has caused Dengue Fever to spread throughout Chiapas and that their organization expects to host a joint conference on Dengue Fever, Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and migrant health with the Ministry of Health in the state of Chiapas. Artola expects to hold the conference later this year. (Comment: RefTel reported the dengue infection rate to be higher in Chiapas than in Guatemala, suggesting that the disease is more endemic to Chiapas than imported. End comment.)

AMBASSADOR LAGON DISCUSSES TIP WITH NGOS in TAPACHULA

15. While in Tapachula, Ambassador Lagon met on January 10 over lunch with NGOs and government officials from Tapachula,

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Guatemala and El Salvador. TIP represents a major concern for government officials and NGOs in Tapachula who face a constant flow of migrants into shelters but with little resources to support them. Government officials from Central America and Mexico all agreed that their own officials lack the resources and training to identify and protect victims. NGOs said that the lack of proper training limits the relationship that they have with authorities on TIP issues. Government officials from Central America concluded their meeting with Ambassador Lagon requesting USG assistance in providing training and resources for their countries in identifying and providing assistance to victims.

AMBASSADOR LAGON TOURS SHELTERS AND INTERVIEWS TIP VICTIM

16. Ambassador Lagon toured INM detention centers, a TIP shelter- Casa del Migrante, to learn more about facilities available for TIP victims. Afterwards, Ambassador Lagon spoke with a 17-year-old trafficking victim in the course of his visit. She described in detail how she was a victim of sexual abuse and internal sex trafficking from Tapachula. With great anguish, the victim recounted how family friends had placed her into contact with a local woman who offered her a job in a bar. Once separated from her family, the victim was isolated, beaten, raped and forced to have sex with different men, including the woman's husband. Still suffering from the severe trauma of this experience, the victim is now assisting with the prosecution of her case and receiving assistance from IOM.

COMMISSIONER OPTIMISTIC BUT RECOGNIZES CHALLENGES AHEAD

17. INM's Commissioner, Cecilia Romero, used her meeting with Lagon to highlight efforts to address TIP over the last six months and possible future challenges in the wake of Mexico's newly adopted anti-TIP law. Although Romero seemed

optimistic about the law and the number of migration officials trained, she was honest about the amount of work Mexico needs to do in order to ensure that the law effectively addresses TIP. Romero identified the following challenges Mexico faces in making progress in combating TIP: lack of funds to support the new law, insufficient public awareness about the issue, and under-trained law enforcement officials to address the psychological needs of a TIP victim. Lagon applauded the GOM's adoption of the new law and stressed that the U.S. was here "to help" Mexico. Romero ended the meeting by saying that she hopes to obtain more help in training agents on identifying and providing services to victims of trafficking.

SRE SEEKS TO INTERNATIONALIZE TIP

18. SRE's Under Secretary for North America, Carlos Rico, described the State Department's Annual Report on TIP as an "irritant." Mexico sought to address TIP not because of criticism registered in the report but out of genuine concern about the problem. Rico sought to draw attention to efforts the U.S. could assume to better address the two countries' shared responsibilities in combating trafficking. To that end, he expressed concern about Mexican citizens exploited in the U.S. and expressed Mexico's interest in working collaboratively to identify and assist them. He also welcomed cooperation with U.S. authorities in developing a concrete joint action plan as well as joint efforts to address TIP on international fora including OAS and the UN. Lagon stressed the importance he attached to a victim-centered approach to tackling TIP. He praised Mexico for passing a strong anti-TIP law; the challenge now was to implement the law including identifying proper resources and creating a vetted unit to investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers.

CNDH EXPRESS CONCERN OVER 2008 TIER RANKING

19. On January 11, Ambassador Lagon met with Dr. Sadot Sanchez Carreno, Coordinator for the Trafficking in Persons

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Program at CNDH, to discuss the creation of new TIP working groups within CNDH. Sanchez used the meeting to highlight the accomplishments made since the last TIP report insisting that the 2007 TIP Report was incorrect. Sanchez committed the organization to becoming more involved with TIP in the future and urged that the USG work closely with the Commission when drafting future TIP reports.

AMBASSADOR LAGON and ATTORNEY GENERAL ADDRESS PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND PROSECUTIONS

110. In a cordial meeting with Mexican Attorney General, Eduardo Medina Mora, Ambassador Lagon, received updates on three major anti-trafficking developments in Mexico: recent enactment of a new federal anti-trafficking law; a Mexican Congressional appropriation of \$7 million USD to open a trafficking shelter for women and children; and designation of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Related to Acts of Violence Against Women (FEVIM) as the lead on anti-TIP cases within PGR. The Attorney General said that Mexico's Public Security Secretariat (SSP) expects to follow a European police model and assign female police officers to trafficking cases in order to build more trust with victims.

--PREVENTION:

AG Medina Mora highlighted the enactment of the new federal law against trafficking in persons. Ambassador Lagon applauded Mexico on the passage of the new law while pointing out that more work needs to be done.

--WITNESS PROTECTION:

Ambassador Lagon expressed concern about limiting the proposed trafficking shelter to women and minors, since it would exclude adult male victims, who are typically victims of labor trafficking. In regards to shelters, AG Medina Mora responded that adult males do not face the same kinds of risks as women and children further anticipating that the new shelter will open before the end of 2008. Medina Mora also indicated that the GOM may utilize several properties confiscated from drug-traffickers, but that the effort is still in the design stage. A shelter may be opened provisionally until a permanent location can be found, and centers for victim assistance may be opened as well.

--PROSECUTIONS:

GOM officials noted the shared problem of sex tourism between Mexico and the U.S., and that Mexico is prosecuting more cases along its northern border. Ambassador Lagon noted his concern about U.S. nationals engaging in sex tourism in Mexico, and expressed his appreciation for the tremendous day-to-day cooperation between the two nations, particularly in the area of law enforcement. Ambassador Lagon continued to stress the importance of gathering better data on TIP cases to better understand the scope of the problem as well as actions taken at the local level to address it. He stressed the importance of cooperation between federal, state and local prosecutors. In response, AG Medina Mora discussed the creation of a vetted unit and providing training specifically for TIP within the Special Prosecutor's Office for Violence Against Women (FEVIM). He said that the GOM is initiating information sharing between PGR and state attorney generals.

NGO EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR TIP

¶11. In a meeting with Mario Luis Fuentes, Director of CEIDAS (Centro de Estudios e Investigacion en Desarrollo y Asistencia Social), a G/TIP sub-grantee, Fuentes conveyed his concern that financial resources have not been set aside in Mexico's 2008 budget to implement the new federal anti-TIP law, particularly in terms of training government officials and developing data to research and analyze the scope of the problem in-country. Moreover, a government lead for the new

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law's interagency committee has not yet been named, so the committee is not operating. Fuentes further noted his concerns about the inability of the current judicial system to process TIP cases, and indicated that Mexico's new anti-TIP law is a "lame duck" without judicial reform. He stressed the need for training judicial officials about the new law, in addition to training on effective victim protection techniques and reintegrating TIP victims back into society. Fuentes also recommended that Mexico develop "minimum norms" for constructing victim shelters applicable to both the government and NGOs, in addition to conducting research on whether drug trafficking networks are being used to move TIP victims. Fuentes suggested that the USG expand the "best practices" section of the annual TIP report, and that USG outreach be conducted in this area. Fuentes told Ambassador Lagon about two future projects: developing a report about the anti-trafficking efforts of Mexico's 32 states, similar to the USG's annual TIP report, which is planned for release in December 2008 and working with high-school and university students to raise anti-TIP awareness and build leadership capacity.

¶12. COMMENT: Lagon's visit to the southern border reinforced the challenges local officials face in combating trafficking given Mexico's meager resources, under-trained

officials, and weak structures. Mexican government officials were optimistic about the passage of the new law but recognized the challenges ahead. Continued U.S. support -- political, technical, and financial -- is vital. Mexico has demonstrated its commitment by adopting its new law. For the law to realize its full potential however, officials will need to identify more resources to assist victims and the political will to prosecute and convict victims.

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